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Vietnam's Domination of Indochina: Ties That Bind

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A Research Paper

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A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by
Office of East Asian Analysis. It was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Southeast Asia Division, OEA,

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Vietnam's Domination of Indochina: Ties That Bind

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Overview

Information available as of 15 October 1982 was used in this report.

Vietnam's overthrow of the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea in 1979 placed Hanoi on the threshold of realizing its 50-year-old goal of unifying Indochina under Vietnamese domination. As it has done in Laos over the past seven years, Hanoi now is extending its control over all sectors of Kampuchean life. In both countries it has established an extensive advisory presence and has provided training for local administrators. Vietnam also maintains a sizable military presence in the two countries and tightly controls the security forces.

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We believe Vietnam ultimately intends to allow its two clients considerable autonomy in administrative matters but plans to closely direct foreign policy and military affairs. We expect actual military operations, however, to be increasingly conducted by the client states—Laos, in fact, is already handling much of its own counterinsurgency.

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Vietnam's efforts at integration in Laos have met few significant obstacles. The Laotian regime has developed a comfortable relationship with its patron, following Vietnam's lead on foreign policy and acceding to Vietnamese guidance on domestic questions. In return, Vientiane receives security assistance against internal opponents and military support to defend its frontier.

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Popular anti-Vietnamese sentiment has discouraged participation in Kampuchean party and government organizations. And the continuing guerrilla war against Democratic Kampuchean resistance forces has prevented Hanoi from consolidating its hold on the countryside. But we have seen no flagging of the Vietnamese commitment to develop a controlled administrative and security apparatus throughout Kampuchea. Nor do we think the Kampuchean resistance strong enough to prevent the gradual consolidation of a Vietnamese-backed regime over the longer term. In the meantime, Hanoi will be forced to continue its extensive involvement in Kampuchea even if the resistance forces are weakened enough to permit a reduction in Vietnamese combat forces there.

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An Indochina Mentality

Hanoi's longstanding efforts to emphasize an "Indochina" identity through development of deep personal ties with Laotian and Kampuchean leaders clearly reflect Vietnam's ambition to dominate the region. Former members of the old Indochinese Communist Party [1] or those who regrouped in North Vietnam following the 1954 Geneva talks are top Laotian and Kampuchean leaders. Lao party leader Kaysone Phomvihan was one of the first Laotians to join the Indochinese party, reputedly as a protege of Ho Chi Minh. Kaysone's deputy, Nouhak Phoumsavan, has a similar background. Several top Kampuchean party leaders lived in Vietnam for most of the 25 years following the end of the French-Indochina War.

Pro-Vietnamese attitudes are reinforced through marriage and through extended visits to Vietnam. marriages between Laotian and Kampuchean officials and Vietnamese women may be part of a Vietnamese policy; Kampuchean leaders—including President Heng Samrin—have Vietnamese wives in response to pressure from Hanoi. Officials in second-echelon positions in Laos and Kampuchea are sent to Vietnam for seminars lasting at least one year. 26 high-ranking Laotian officials—including three ministers, five deputy ministers, one women's leader, three generals, and the deputy chief of the party organization department—were scheduled to go to Vietnam for 14 months' training in 1980-81. Another eight officials—most in military or security positions and at least deputy minister level—left in February for two years of training in political theory.

Vietnam appears to be significantly involved in both Kampuchean and Laotian personnel matters. We believe that Hanoi has in effect appointed most Kampuchean functionaries, and, at least at the higher levels, Hanoi appears to control personnel changes. Last December, for example, Hanoi removed Kampuchea's President and party general secretary Pen Sovan, who, was too nationalistic and antagonistic toward the Vietnamese. We do not know whether Vietnam actually selects Laotian officials or simply vetoes local choices. the Vietnamese planned in 1980 to remove some Laotian officials, although we have seen no evidence of this policy.

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Institutionalizing Dominance in Government and Party

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The Vietnamese, of course, do not depend on personal ties to ensure compliance. In Laos, where a compliant client party already exists, the Vietnamese monitor the activities of Laotian officials through an extensive adviser network. In Kampuchea, the Vietnamese are creating sympathetic party and government organizations from the ground up.

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The Adviser System. Vietnamese advisers are in almost every ministry in Laos and Kampuchea. virtually no significant action or major policy decision can be taken in either country without Vietnamese agreement. national- and provincial-level advisers check the daily work of their Indochinese counterparts, overrule decisions they consider inimical to Vietnamese interests, and give "advice" that has the impact of a direct order.

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[1] The Indochinese Communist Party was founded by Ho Chi Minh in March 1930; Laotian and Kampuchean branches were created later the same year. In 1951 the party was disbanded by the Vietnamese to allow the branches to take advantage of nationalist sentiment in each of the three nations.

Table 1
Leadership Ties

	Position	Ties to Vietnam
Kampuchea		
Heng Samrin	Chairman of the Council of State; General Secretary of Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP)	Sought refuge in Vietnam after 1978 rebellion against Pol Pot; handpicked by Hanoi to lead the anti-Pol Pot forces; may have Vietnamese wife.
Say Phouthang	Vice Chairman of Council of State	Regrouped in Hanoi in 1954, where he lived until 1970; escaped Pol Pot purge in 1974.
Chea Sim	Chairman of the National Assembly	Sought refuge in Vietnam after 1978 rebellion against Pol Pot.
Bou Thang	Minister of Defense; Secretary of KPRP Central Committee	Montagnard; regrouped in Hanoi in 1954 where he lived until 1970; escaped Pol Pot purge in 1974; may have Vietnamese wife.
Hun Sen	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Sought refuge in Vietnam after 1977 rebellion against Pol Pot; handpicked by Hanoi to head regime's youth movement.
Chea Soth	Minister of Planning	Regrouped to Hanoi in 1954; worked for Vietnam News Agency until 1970, then ran Pol Pot news agency in Hanoi until 1974; became first Heng Samrin ambassador to Hanoi in 1979.
Chan Si	Chairman of the Council of Ministers	Regrouped to Hanoi in 1955; later returned to Kampuchea; escaped Pol Pot purge in 1978; may have Vietnamese wife.
Laos		
Kaysone Phomvihan	General Secretary of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP); Prime Minister	Former member of the Indochinese Communist Party; protege of Ho Chi Minh; half-Vietnamese.
Nouhak Phoumsavan	Deputy Prime Minister; Minister of Finance	Former member of the Indochinese Communist Party; has Vietnamese wife.
Souphanouvong	President; President of the Supreme People's Assembly	Old ally of Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh; has Vietnamese wife.
Phoumi Vongvichit	Deputy Prime Minister; Minister of Education, Sports and Religious Affairs	Protege of Souphanouvong; may be closer to Chinese than Vietnamese.
Khamtai Siphandon	Deputy Prime Minister; Minister of National Defense	Few ties to Vietnamese.
Phoun Sipaseut	Deputy Prime Minister; Minister of Foreign Affairs	Trained in North Vietnam; considered to be "pro-Soviet."
Sisomphon Lovansai	Vice President of the Supreme People's Assembly	Possibly a member of Vietnam's Lao Dong Party, predecessor of present Vietnamese Communist Party; Souphanouvong's private secretary.

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In Laos "special advisers" maintain contact with their respective ministers in Vientiane. In 1980, there were over 90 Vietnamese advisers in the 800-strong Prime Minister's office alone, including 30 paid out of Laotian funds, to help administer and monitor the activities of the party central committee. The Vietnamese presence, in fact, is about equal to the Lao party contingent—only about 100 of the Laotian employees in the office are party members. In 1979 former Laotian Government officials stated that the Laotian National Planning

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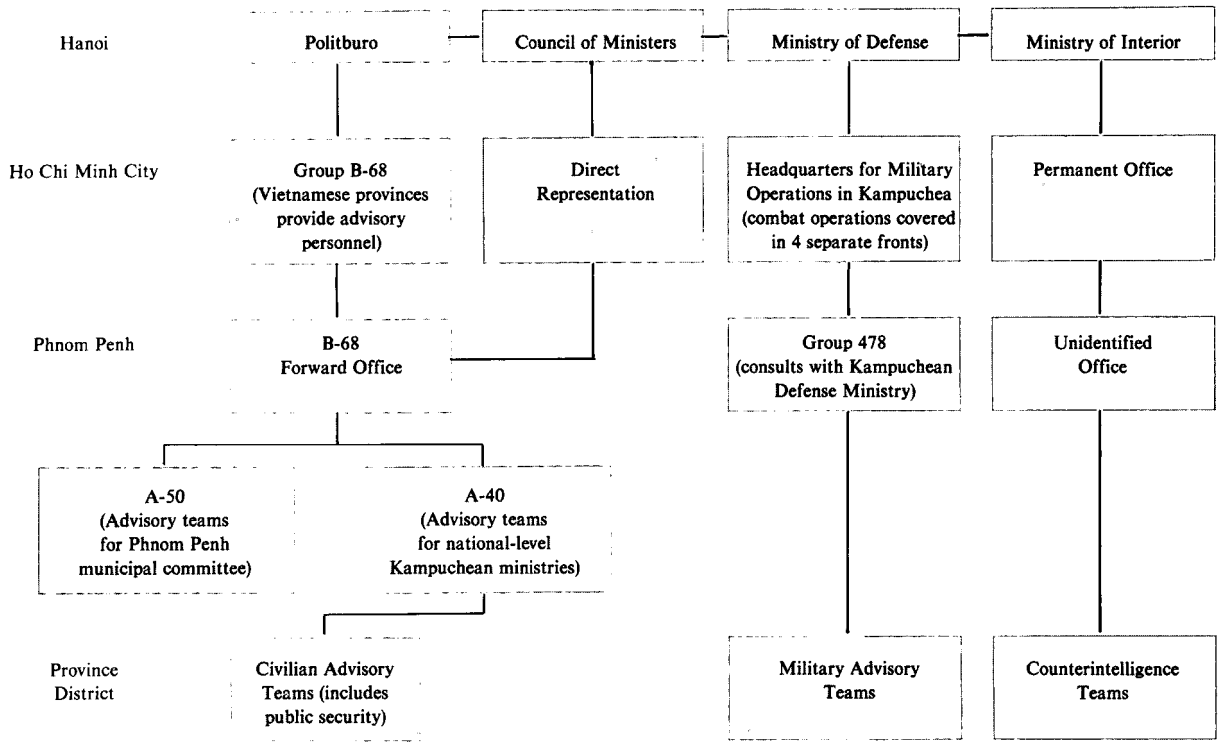
Figure 2
Vietnamese Advisory Structure in Kampuchea



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Committee—responsible for coordinating the programs of all ministries except defense—and the Finance Ministry—responsible for both the nation's economic policies and for providing financial support for all civilian ministries—had Vietnamese advisers in every department.

Kampuchea has an even more prominent Vietnamese presence. Not only are there Vietnamese advisers at nearly all levels of government, but many Kampuchean officials are actually Khmer Krom—a Kampuchean minority living in Vietnam—or ethnic Vietnamese residents of Kampuchea

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The Sister Province Program

Hanoi provides local military forces, material assistance, and civilian advisers to Kampuchea and Laos through a "sister province" program established in 1979. Under the program, Vietnamese provinces are responsible for funneling personnel and supplies to their Indochinese counterparts. Dong Nai Province supplies its Kampuchean "sister," Kampong Thum Province, for example, with approximately 60,000 liters of petroleum products each month as well as advisers and token amounts of rice. We have evidence of "sister province" relationships involving 14 of Kampuchea's 18 provinces, and two in Laos:

Laotian Province	***Vietnamese "Sister Province"***
Attapu	*Gia Lai-Cong Tum*
Saravan	*Quang Nam-Danang*
Kampuchean Province	
Rotanokiri	*Unknown*
Mondol Kiri	*Dac Lac*
Stoeng Treng	*Phu Khanh*
Preah Vihear	*Gia Lai-Cong Tum or Thuan Hai*
Kracheh	*Song Be*[1]
Kampong Cham	*Tay Ninh*
Prey Veng	*Lam Dong*[1]
Svay Rieng	*Long An*
Kampong Thum	*Dong Nai*
Kandal	*Ben Tre*
Takev	*An Giang*
Kampot	*Kien Giang*
Kaoh Kong	*Minh Hai*
Kampong Spoe	*Cuu Long*
Pouthisat	*Unknown*
Kampong Chhnang	*Hau Giang*
Siemreab-Otdar Meanchey	*Binh Tri Thien*
Batdambang	*Quang Nam-Danang*
Cities	
Phnom Penh	*Ho Chi Minh City*
Kampong Saom	*Haiphong*

[1] *Possible*

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the officialdom of Batdambang Province is dominated by Khmer Krom. Meanchey Province, tor, had as provincial governor a Kampuchean who spent 20 years in North Vietnam and who has a Vietnamese wife. In some provinces, other ethnic minorities hold top provincial positions—with Vietnamese military officers as their advisers. In the case of Preah Vihear Province, two top positions—that of provincial party chairman and province militia commander—were actually held by Montagnards from Laos who had been in the Vietnamese Army until 1979.

Group B-68 as the control organization for Vietnam's civilian advisory effort in Kampuchea. Headquartered in Ho Chi Minh City with a forward office attached to the embassy in Phnom Penh, B-68 apparently reports directly to the Vietnamese Politburo and transmits Hanoi's directives to the advisers in the field, bypassing Kampuchean Government channels.

The group's impact on Kampuchean political activities is far reaching. B-68 oversees Kampuchean party activities, including the recruitment and training of Kampuchean party members and cadre. Two subgroups of B-68 direct Vietnamese advisers in Kampuchea's national ministries and those in the municipal administration of Phnom Penh. The chief of the forward office in Phnom Penh, receives daily reports directly from the Kampuchean President.

Building for the Future. We believe that Hanoi's own need for trained personnel and its desire to project a low profile to the outside world will propel it toward reducing its large advisory establishment as quickly as possible. The number of advisers in both countries appears to have been reduced somewhat.

We believe the rate and extent of the reduction of the advisory establishments will depend primarily upon the political reliability of the local cadre being trained; the new cadres' abilities and their acceptability to the local populations are probably of secondary importance. As it has done with senior officials, Vietnam has given new cadres intensive propagandizing and long-term training. Vietnam in early 1979 started sending groups of local cadre to party schools in Ho Chi Minh City for two to three months of political indoctrination. By 1982 the program had advanced enough for cadre to be trained in Phnom Penh the political school in the Kampuchean capital would graduate its second political studies class of 227 in May of this year. These graduates in turn would train other Kampucheans. The Kampuchean party nevertheless remains small the Vietnamese themselves counted only 195 Kampuchean party members in February 1980.

Laos, has sent 6,000 to 12,000 students abroad since 1976, mostly to Vietnam. Those who went to Vietnam last year received primary and secondary education. When the students return—600 in 1981—they will first supplement and then replace the officials held over from the royalist days.

The Military and Security Controls

Vietnam's 50,000 troops in Laos and 180,000 in Kampuchea are the bulwark against antiregime forces in the two client states. In the short term, actual combat operations—particularly in Kampuchea—are the most important aspect of Vietnam's military efforts in Indochina. But Vietnam's military advisory network, paralleling efforts in the civilian sector, may be of greater long-term significance. Vietnamese control over internal security, moreover, ensures that both the advisers and local officials act in Hanoi's interests.

Military Advisers. By counting the number of Vietnamese provincial units we have identified as engaged in training the new Kampuchean Army, we estimate that as much as 30 percent of the Vietnamese troops

in Kampuchea are engaged in advisory work. We have no data for Laos but believe that most of the Vietnamese troops there are regular forces, the number committed to advisory work probably would be substantially less.

The Vietnamese have had to build the Kampuchean Army from scratch. Early commanders often were drawn from the ranks of the Vietnamese Army. The US Embassy in Bangkok reported in 1980 that retired Vietnamese noncommissioned officers were brought to Kampuchea as district and subdistrict militia advisers. Kampuchean officer trainees have been trained in Vietnam, although training is beginning at two new military academies in Kampuchea.

Vietnamese military advisers are attached to all Kampuchean units above the battalion level. Smaller Kampuchean units, are either twinned to larger Vietnamese units or are subordinate to Kampuchean provincial revolutionary committees, which are controlled by the Vietnamese.

The little information we have for Laos suggests a much lighter hand. Vietnamese attention in Laos, is concentrated on transforming a longtime guerrilla Army into a conventional force. Aid for the Laotian military thus is oriented toward technical instruction, logistic support, and training. While Vietnamese troops guard Laos's border with China, the Laotians themselves handle much of their counterinsurgency efforts.

The Security Apparatus. Client state security forces are under tight—in Kampuchea virtually total—Vietnamese control. We believe that the Vietnamese security operations have two duties: to assist local security forces to combat antiregime activities, and to monitor the actions of the Vietnamese advisers themselves. security officials range from those attached to provincial advisory teams to those who report directly to the Vietnamese Ministry of the Interior. In Laos, according to Western press accounts, the latter type of official is handled by a unit that reports directly to Hanoi.

Officials tied to the Vietnamese Ministry of the Interior operate as a self-contained group and, report directly to an office in Ho Chi Minh City. This office is headed by Interior Vice Minister Cao Dang Chiem, chief for southern Vietnam and once party deputy security chief in South Vietnam during the war with the United States. Chiem was promoted last March from alternate to full party central committee membership and is now ranked 21st on the 116-member committee.

Security advisers, like their civilian counterparts, monitor the daily activities of their Laotian and Kampuchean charges. In Laos, Vietnamese advisers instruct party and government officials involved with the reeducation camps. Vietnamese security officials run the two political prisons in Phnom Penh and a reeducation camp with 1,000 prisoners in nearby Kampong Cham Province. Personal security for senior Kampuchean officials, in addition, is handled by a Vietnamese executive security detachment codenamed K-10. In Laos, where the Pathet Lao developed an autonomous security apparatus, such total control is more difficult and possibly unnecessary because of the lengthy close relationship. senior Laotian security officials to at least vice ministerial rank are sent to Vietnam for prolonged training.

Obstacles to Integration

Besides the debilitating effects of the war in Kampuchea, Vietnam's deteriorating economic situation limits the material aid it can give and competes for the limited managerial and technical expertise dedicated to the advisory programs. Furthermore, Hanoi's continued occupation of Kampuchea has denied it access to needed Western and international aid. We believe that, so far, Kampuchea and Laos have received

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Table 2
Vietnam's Treaty Network

Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation (signed 18 February 1979 in Phnom Penh)		Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation (signed 18 July 1977 in Vientiane)
"Protect and expand" tradition of military solidarity; mutual assistance in all fields; both sides to impress cadre and people with this tradition.	Article 1	Mutual pledge to protect and develop special relations; both sides to educate party and people about this relationship.
Support and assist each other at other's request; each party will take necessary measures to enforce treaty at other's request.	Article 2	Both sides will support and cooperate on defense and territorial integrity.
Both sides to encourage economic, scientific, cultural, medical, and technical cooperation and assistance.	Article 3	Both sides to encourage mutual assistance to develop each side's "material potentialities"; expanded trade and special preferential treatment.
Conflicts will be resolved through negotiations; both sides pledge to negotiate and sign a boundary demarcation treaty.	Article 4	Both sides acknowledge the agreement on delimitation of frontiers signed 18 July 1977.
Each side will respect the other's "self-reliant" policy; foreign policy will be in close accord with principle of mutual noninterference; pledges of mutual support.	Article 5	Support for Southeast Asian people's struggle for national independence, genuine democracy, peace, and neutrality; pledge of friendship and cooperation with other countries.
Regular exchange of views on all problems.	Article 6	Regular exchange of views on all problems and expansion of relations between mass organizations.
This treaty does not mean to set apart Laos, Kampuchea, and Vietnam and does not interfere with other agreements.	Article 7	Treaty has 25-year validity; "tacitly" renewed every 10 years; can be canceled on one year's written notice.
Treaty effective on date of protocol.	Article 8	None.
Five-year treaty automatically renewed to 10 unless express written intention to annul given one year in advance.	Article 9	None.

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preferred treatment on personnel needs. Hanoi appears willing to tolerate shortages of technical personnel, capital, and materials at home that have contributed to the stagnation of industrial development in Vietnam.

Nationalism—in an anti-Vietnamese manifestation—poses potentially the most serious obstacle to Vietnamese suzerainty. Kampuchea especially—for several centuries a victim of Vietnamese expansion—is a source of never-ending problems for Hanoi.

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a high desertion rate in the Kampuchean Army and party and government organizations are common. 25X6

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And the still popular Prince Sihanouk, the president of the resistance coalition, continues to draw recruits from Kampucheans along the border with Thailand. 25X6

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In Laos, where there is much less popular antipathy toward the Vietnamese and where more of the party membership have long associations with their Vietnamese counterparts, the problems have been fewer. Fights and shootings have been reported, but there appears to be little widespread tension in the relationship.

No Policy Change Likely

We expect these obstacles to complicate—but not derail—completion of de facto federation. The resistance groups are not strong enough to oust the Vietnamese militarily.[3] Moreover, Vietnam's economic problems are caused largely by domestic difficulties that could not be solved by diverting resources now employed in its two client states. Hanoi may believe that time will solve the more serious problem caused in part by the invasion of Kampuchea—the loss of nearly all non-Soviet economic aid. As its long-term program of training pro-Vietnamese officials allows the withdrawal of some troops and advisers, we believe the Vietnamese expect their presence to become more acceptable to foreign governments.

We believe Vietnam has achieved in Laos the level of integration it desires. The regime is relatively secure, and its still weak political institutions are stable enough to support it. Hanoi's long and close relationship with Laotian leaders, and its program of developing similar ties with the second echelon ensure Vietnamese influence for the near future. As more Laotians return from training in Vietnam, their familiarity with Vietnamese methods will further strengthen the relationship. In the remote possibility that a new Laotian leadership proves restive under Vietnamese domination, Hanoi can rely on extensive security penetration and its military garrison and to preserve its dominance.

Vietnam has been less successful in Kampuchea. Despite a heavy investment of troops and advisers and intensive propagandizing in the countryside, Hanoi's Kampuchean client regime cannot stand unsupported. Its appeal is limited, partly because of the regime's close identification with Vietnam, and it has had difficulty attracting or holding the indigenous recruits it needs to project its influence throughout the country. As a result, Hanoi will be forced to continue its extensive involvement and maintain its high political profile in Kampuchea at least over the next several years, even if the Kampuchean resistance is weakened enough to permit a reduction in Vietnam's military presence.

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